# Unmasking and Masking Fictional Onomastics as a Form of Communication: A Study of Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and *the Housemaid*

**Patience Anim[1] and Shirley Banini[2]**

Department of Communication Studies, University of Professional Studies, Accra, Accra, Ghana.

Correspondence: Patience Anim (patience.anim@upsamail.edu.gh)

## ABSTRACT

This study examines how the duality of masking and unmasking in fictional onomastics is constructed through character and place names as communicative tools that convey complex meanings and delineate functional identities in Amma Darko's novels *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) and *The Housemaid* (1998). The study adopts a qualitative, documentary research design, relying solely on analysis of the above two literary texts rather than human participants. The methodology is literary onomastics analysis operationalised through close reading and qualitative content analysis of the two primary novels. Specifically, De Vries's literary onomastics (2006), alongside relevant frameworks from gender studies and semantics, constitute the theoretical framework. The analysis examines Darko's strategic naming choices. A close reading of the texts reveals how names both conceal and reveal character roles, social relations, and cultural connotations. The semantic richness of these names as a means of communication highlights disparities in life conditions, socio-cultural identities, and the power dynamics between female and male characters in the African and non-African patriarchal societies. The study shows that characters, especially women, use name strategies to assert their identities and communicate positive roles in their societies depicted in the novels. The central argument posits that onomastics encapsulates gendered identities and reflects sociocultural dynamics. Findings suggest that Darko's naming conventions enhance narrative cohesion while inviting critical engagement with the complexities of identity and setting. The study underscores the significance of onomastic choices in shaping character perceptions, indicating that names can both mask or reveal identities. The research connects literary analysis with communication studies by showing how names shape interpretation and meaning, particularly through the role of product names in advertising effectiveness, and it encourages further research into how cultural and genre-specific naming conventions influence consumer responses.

Keywords: Communication| fictional onomastics| masking| unmasking| anthroponymy| toponymy| functional identity

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Onomastics, the scholarly study of names, examines both personal names (anthroponomastics) and place names (toponomastics) (Pugh & Johnson, 2014; Bright, 2003). While names mark identity and help locate individuals or places, they also convey cultural, social, and philosophical information. In

literary texts, therefore, names transcend mere labels; they communicate ideas and help construct fictional worlds, thereby enhancing their relevance in the study of imaginative prose. The communicative significance of fictional names arises from the relationship between an author's choice, its textual representation, and the reader's interpretation. Communication involves exchanging information with particular attention to the conveyed message (Oyewo, 2024). In fiction, authors select names based on their literal meanings, cultural associations, historical references, or phonological features. When readers encounter these names in narrative contexts, they can draw on these associations to form interpretations regarding a character or setting. Thus, fictional names function as communicative resources through which the text encodes information that readers interpret. Agyekum (2006) asserts that names mark both identity and information, further linking fictional onomastics to communication.

Bright's (2003) distinction between personal and place names is particularly useful for literary analysis. Personal names may evoke aspects of identity, personality, social position, or cultural affiliation, while place names often resonate with historical significance, belonging, geographical context. Examining these categories therefore allows for a deeper understanding of how these names function narratively. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the duality of masking and unmasking in fictional onomastics, particularly in Amma Darko's novels, *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) and *The Housemaid* (1998).

However, while literary onomastics in Africa has focused largely on male canonical writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka and treated names as stable markers of culture, little attention has been paid to the duality of masking and unmasking in Ghanaian fiction; thus, how names simultaneously conceal and reveal identity. Darko's novels, *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid*, crucial to Ghanaian women's writing, have primarily been examined through feminist/sociological perspectives, with limited focus on her onomastic strategies. Existing studies also separate personal names from place names, overlooking how Darko integrates both to map identity onto space. This study is relevant in three ways. First, it grounds onomastic theory in Ghanaian naming philosophy, where a name encodes destiny, lineage and circumstance, thereby decolonising literary analysis. Second, it shows how Darko's names reflect critical contemporary Ghanaian issues: rural-urban migration, exploitation of housemaids, and the illusion of Europe, where names mask vulnerability as respectability while revealing patriarchal and economic exploitation. Third, it proposes a replicable model for analysing Ghanaian literature, strengthening pedagogy and preserving Ghanaian literary identity.

To fill this gap, this study investigates how character and place names serve as communication tools and convey complex meanings that delineate identities within the narratives. Employing frameworks

from literary onomastics, gender studies, and semantics, the analysis will highlight Darko's strategic naming choices and explore how these names conceal or reveal character roles, social relations, and cultural connotations.

The study matters because it advances understanding of naming as a literary and communicative practice, and how naming conventions encapsulate gendered identities and reflect sociocultural dynamics, particularly in the context of power relations in African and non-African patriarchal societies. By examining the meanings and functions of fictional personal and place names, it shows how onomastic analysis can illuminate aspects of characterisation, setting, identity, culture, and narrative meaning. It also contributes to the broader study of language and literature by showing how seemingly ordinary naming choices can communicate complex ideas. The study is guided by the following research questions:

How does the role of naming and communication serve as a pivotal framework for comprehending the relationships between the two female and two male characters in their respective locales within the novels?

In what ways do the fictional names of the characters serve as communicative tools, and how do they shape the reader's perception of character and geographical location?

The study makes two key contributions. Theoretically, it advances fictional onomastics by conceptualising naming as a communication tool that masks and unmasks gendered power relations and identities across locales. Contextually, it links literary analysis to issues central to business and professional studies in Ghana: informal labour, female migration, and socio-economic vulnerability through the lens of Amma Darko's work. The research is organised in the following literature, methodology and conclusion.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The research is anchored in De Vries' (2006) literary onomastics framework, which "involves analysing the principles and meanings behind the names chosen by authors, examining how these names serve as symbols that reflect and shape the narrative's sociocultural environment" (p.93). De Vries' (2006) framework is relevant because it enables the analysis of Darko's character and place names as deliberate symbols that reflect and shape the sociocultural realities of the narratives, thus supporting the examination of masking and unmasking of identities. Literary onomastics matters as a form of communication because it explores how authors use names to communicate thematic significance, characterisation, and cultural context. Agyekum (2006) and Udoye and Cyril (2012)

affirm that names function not only as identity markers but also as media for conveying information. Rey (1995) expands on this by asserting that names function referentially, designating individuals or collective entities. This foundational perspective frames names as linguistic expressions that identify people, places, or other entities. However, the communicative significance of names transcends mere reference; in literary contexts, they evoke meanings connected to linguistic forms, cultural origins, historical backgrounds, and social usages. Thus, while a name identifies a character or setting, it may also communicate broader meanings associated with the entity it designates.

This dual function of names, thus establishing reference while simultaneously inviting interpretive associations, bridges Rey's referential view with the interpretive stance taken in this study. Names are positioned as referential expressions whose importance extends to semantic, cultural, and ideological dimensions within particular literary contexts. The interplay of naming and communication further supports the argument that names convey valuable information about the individuals or entities they represent (Agyekum, 2006; Udoye & Cyril, 2012).

In fiction, an author's choice of a name is a deliberate textual decision. The interpretation of that name, however, is contingent on its linguistic form, narrative context, and the reader's cultural knowledge. For example, a character's name may communicate information about their identity, social position, cultural affiliation, or relationship with other characters. Similarly, place names may contribute to the representation of geographical space by evoking historical, cultural, or social associations. Consequently, the communicative function of fictional names emerges through the nexus of naming, textual representation, and reader interpretation. Literature conveys these meanings, while onomastic analysis offers a way to examine how names shape them.

Scholarly investigations into onomastics frequently highlight names as indicators of identity, cultural values, and historical narratives within particular communities. Agyekum (2006) and Pugh and Johnson (2014), for instance, present names as cultural artefacts that convey social information and shape individual and collective identities. While these perspectives establish the cultural and communicative roles of names, they often overlook how fictional naming can produce meanings beyond names' immediate referential functions. The present study extends this understanding by examining masking and unmasking as interpretive processes through which fictional names may conceal, disclose, or complicate information about characters and their socio-cultural relationships. This analysis does not merely apply onomastics to another set of names; it distinguishes between names' referentiality and their potential to communicate meanings that may initially be hidden, displaced, or revealed through narrative contexts.

This interpretive approach is particularly applicable to Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid*, where names can be examined as part of the broader representation of identity and social relations. The study does not posit that Darko's naming practices necessarily express a predetermined authorial intention. Instead, it investigates how selected names function within the narratives and how their meanings may be interpreted in relation to the characters, settings, and socio-cultural contexts in which they occur. The analysis therefore considers whether names reveal or conceal aspects of identity, social position, and interpersonal relationships, and how such meanings are constructed through their use in the texts. This provides a basis for examining the relationship between naming and the representation of gendered experiences without reducing the analysis to a claim about authorial purpose.

Names also carry cultural and social connotations that help identify the persons or entities they represent (Agyekum, 2006). Drawing on Diyanni (1997), literature functions as a medium through which writers communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings about human experience. In this study, this perspective supports an examination of how Darko's use of Akan names contributes to representing cultural identity and social relationships. The novels are therefore treated as literary texts in which naming may be analysed as part of communicating socio-cultural meanings. Where the narratives appear to satirise antisocial behaviours or expose social inequalities, such observations are understood as interpretations arising from the textual evidence, rather than as established statements of Darko's recurrent authorial purpose. The study consequently examines how selected names contribute to the representation of identity, gender relations, and socio-cultural meanings, while recognising that their significance is shaped by the interaction between linguistic form, narrative context, and reader interpretation.

### 2.2 Empirical Literature

Empirical research shows that linguistic, cultural, social, historical, and communicative factors influence the formation and use of names. Studies on personal naming reveal that names are rarely arbitrary labels; they encode information about family circumstances, religious beliefs, social expectations, historical experiences, and cultural identity (Agyekum, 2006; Udoye & Cyril, 2012; Pugh & Johnson, 2014). Agyekum (2006), for instance, shows that Akan personal names reflect personal circumstances surrounding birth, family experiences, beliefs, aspirations, and social identity. Similarly, Udoye and Cyril (2012) establish that names provide social and cultural information, demonstrating that naming motivations extend beyond straightforward identification to encompass the social and cultural circumstances from which they arise. This indicates that naming is a process through which communities encode aspects of social experience and identity in linguistic forms.

The linguistic structure of names provides another important dimension of empirical research. Studies suggest that names result from various linguistic processes, including compounding, derivation, abbreviation, borrowing, blending, clipping, semantic extension, and phonological manipulation (Chan & Huang, 2001; González-del-Río et al., 2012; Özbal et al., 2012). Chan and Huang's (2001) analysis of 1,304 Chinese brand names across ten product categories reveals that the linguistic principles guiding naming vary with market conditions and product categories. Furthermore, Özbal et al. (2012) show that creative naming uses identifiable linguistic devices that vary by business domains and the desired efforts of name creators. Research on brand-name translation further indicates that both phonetic and semantic components influence naming decisions, with linguistic intuitions and knowledge playing vital roles in name construction across languages (Schmitt & Zhang, 2012). These findings establish that names possess a linguistic architecture that can be systematically analysed through morphological, phonological, semantic, and orthographic features.

Empirical research on commercial and product naming underscores the strategic relationship between linguistic form and communicative purpose. Brand names are devised to foster favourable associations, facilitate recognition, differentiate products, and communicate specific attributes to consumers (Chan & Huang, 2001; Argo et al., 2010; Schmitt & Zhang, 2012). Argo et al. (2010) demonstrate through experimental studies that sound repetition in brand names can generate positive affect and influence brand evaluations and product choice. Similarly, Shrum et al. (2012) found that phonetic symbolism impacts brand-name preferences across different languages, particularly when a name's sound characteristics align with product attributes. More recently, Brennan et al. (2024) provided experimental evidence that phonesthemic elements—recurring sound and spelling clusters associated with particular meanings—can positively affect consumer preference, attitude, purchase intention, and choices when their meanings align with product categories. Such studies demonstrate that a name's linguistic form functions as a communicative resource, activating specific meanings and associations.

In the Ghanaian context, research offers further evidence of the relationship between linguistic structure and product naming. Kongo et al. (2024), in their analysis of 1,000 pharmaceutical brand names registered with Ghana's Food and Drugs Authority, identified morphemic patterns in their formation and examined their relationships to perceived product effects. This finding is crucial because it shows that naming practices in Ghana are culturally meaningful and can be systematically analysed at the morphological level. The study further suggests that product names may be constructed to link a name's linguistic form to characteristics attributed to the product (Kongo et al., 2024). Alongside research on Chinese and international brand naming, this evidence demonstrates that name formation is influenced by a complex interaction of linguistic resources, product

characteristics, market considerations, and audience perceptions (Chan & Huang, 2001; González-del-Río et al., 2012; Schmitt & Zhang, 2012).

Place-name research offers another dimension in understanding the communicative and cultural functions of naming. Empirical studies of toponymy reveal that place names connect to historical experiences, cultural identity, geographical characteristics, political processes, and collective memory (Agyekum, 2006; Alasli, 2019). Alasli (2019), for example, demonstrates that toponyms contribute to identity by attaching meanings to geographical spaces and transmitting aspects of community identity over generations. As a result, place names do not merely distinguish locations; they preserve information about the people, experiences, and values associated with particular spaces. This finding has implications for literary analysis, as fictional place names may similarly evoke cultural, historical, geographical, or ideological associations. By studying personal names alongside place names, researchers can better understand how naming functions contribute to representing both individuals and the spaces they inhabit.

Additionally, commercial and place naming, empirical research on fictional naming shows that authors carefully consider linguistic and contextual choices when naming characters. Black and Wilcox (2011), through interviews with fiction writers and analysis of published texts, found that authors consciously select character names based on factors such as accessibility to readers, compatibility with characters' personalities and backgrounds, available naming sources, and personal significance. Likewise, Heyd (2022) shows that sociolinguistic considerations influence fictional naming, with character names bearing social meanings within literary texts. Palaeas (2005), in her examination of names in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, depicts that character names can create ironic relationships between a character's portrayed identity and the identity implied by the name. Similarly, Seema (2019) found that character names in Matlosa's *Mopheme* communicate information about characters' personalities, behaviours, and relationships. Gibka (2025) further argues that character names may serve multiple functions within literary narratives with some functions potentially changing during translation. Collectively, these studies affirm that fictional names can operate as meaningful narrative devices rather than mere referential markers.

Taken together, the empirical literature establishes that naming is a multidimensional practice influenced by linguistic structures, cultural values, social circumstances, historical experiences, commercial objectives, narrative purposes, and audience interpretation (Agyekum, 2006; Chan & Huang, 2001; Pugh & Johnson, 2014; Schmitt & Zhang, 2012; Kongo et al., 2024). Research indicates that names influence entities by reflecting individual and societal values; brand names show how linguistic form can be manipulated to create associations and perception; place names connect to history and collective identity; and fictional names enhance characterisation, irony, and narrative

meaning (Alasli, 2019; Black & Wilcox, 2011). Studies have shown how personal names affect perceptions and opportunities, supporting the assertion that names carry social significance beyond mere identification. However, research on names has often been fragmented, with limited investigation of the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions of fictional names and their implications for character socio-cultural relationships. The study addresses this gap by examining Akan names in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) and *The Housemaid* (1998), focusing on their linguistic structure, cultural associations, contextual meanings, and communicative functions.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive design grounded in literary onomastics and close textual analysis. It examines how fictional names function as communicative resources in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) and *The Housemaid* (1998). The analysis considers the morphological, semantic, contextual, and communicative dimensions of naming, with attention to characterisation, gender, power, identity, and place.

The two novels were purposively selected because naming is closely connected to character representation and social relationships in both texts. Four focal character names were selected: Mara, Akobi, and Comfort from *Beyond the Horizon (*hereafter*, BTH)*, and Tika and Mr Nsorhwe from *The Housemaid* (henceforth, *THM*). The selection was based on the characters' prominence and the interpretive significance of their names. Relevant toponyms, including Naka, Kataso, Accra, and Germany, were also examined where they contribute to interpreting names and their communicative functions. The primary unit of analysis is the fictional personal name within its immediate narrative and relational context. Each name was examined in relation to its linguistic form, literal or lexical meaning, narrative representation, relationships with other characters, and associated geographical locations. Relevant passages containing the focal names, descriptions, interactions, and naming events were identified through repeated close reading of the two novels.

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the study established the linguistic structure and meaning of each name using relevant onomastic and linguistic scholarship. Second, the meanings of the names were compared with the characters' narrative representations to identify correspondence, contrast, irony, or disjunction. Third, the names were examined in relation to communication, gender, power, identity, and interpersonal relationships. Finally, associated toponyms were considered, followed by a cross-textual comparison of the cases.

### 3.2 Theme Development

Themes were developed through a combination of theory-informed and inductive analysis. The concepts of naming as communication and the masking and unmasking of meaning provided initial analytical orientations, while recurring patterns in the textual data informed the final thematic categories. The resulting themes were subsequently related to the study's research questions. Interpretations were grounded in relevant textual evidence and supported by appropriate onomastic and linguistic scholarship. The analysis distinguished between established lexical meanings and the researcher's literary interpretation. Claims were restricted to the selected characters and novels and were not generalised to Ghanaian society or Darko's entire body of work. Because the study uses published literary texts and involves no human participants, it did not require participant-related ethical procedures.

## 4.0 ANALYSIS

This section examines the relevance of four selected fictional names Mara, Tika, Nsorhwe, and Akobi—representing characters in *BTH* and *THM,* and their associations with various toponyms. These names reflect the protagonists' lived experiences, depicting themes of suffering, pain, and agency during their sojourns in Naka, Kataso, Accra, and Germany. Using anthroponymy and toponymy, this study analyses how names and settings shape characters' identities, emphasising the interplay between identity and nomenclature in the narrative. The analysis is structured around two main themes: "Communication: Puppet, vulnerability, complicity and breaking free," and "Crusaders and Custodians: Communication and exploration of name change in postcolonial identity."

## 4.0 Findings/Results

Mara begins her journey from Naka to Accra to marry Akobi, where she lived experiences of suffering and pain. Darko's portrayal of Mara, whose name evokes both biblical connotations of "bitterness" and significant personal agency within the Fanti dialect—part of the Akan linguistic family— "Mara" translates to "I" or "me," conveying self-identity and personal agency through emphatic pronouns (Agyekum, 2010). This duality reflects the complexities of misogyny and emotional hardship in her marriage to Akobi, while also critiquing societal systems that perpetuate violence against women. Mara's emotional turmoil is demonstrated through her oppressive environment, particularly in her relationship with Akobi. Darko vividly portrays her suffering, especially during an incident of physical violence following the revelation of her pregnancy to Akobi. Instead of support, she encounters hostility, resulting in trauma and isolation. Akobi's aggression is evident when he questions her pregnancy, culminating in a violent outburst that leaves her devastated. Akobi inquires: "And why did you get pregnant?" and proceeds to give a swift and brutal response: Before Mara

replies and knows: “Wham! First slap … wham! Wham! Wham! Three more in succession. And I scurried into what had now become my favourite corner, slumping to the floor. What had I done wrong?” (p.17). Mara’s relationships and her husband’s behaviour are further critiqued through the perceptions of supporting characters, such as Mama Kiosk, who labels Akobi “a bad husband’’ (p.13). The external validation of Mara’s struggles highlights a collective recognition of her victimisation within her community, illuminating the gender dynamics and social structures that impede progress towards sustainability in both personal and communal relationships.

Darko’s narrative depicts how Mara embodies complicity in her suffering, navigating the societal expectation to “respect, obey and worship her husband” (p.13) despite enduring considerable hardship. Darko constructs to communicate a narrative that not only depicts the harsh realities faced by women like Mara but also critiques the societal systems that sustain such violence. Mara embodies a multifaceted significance that transcends its biblical association, suggesting both complicity in morally objectionable actions and a courageous assertion of agency. The name evokes notions of gender agency, particularly in the context of structural versus voluntary agency. Women like Mara often accept emotional and physical hardships as normative, leading her to feel akin to being “driven to the slaughterhouse.” Mara reflects on her marriage: “Many things that happened in my marriage appeared to me to be matter-of-course things that happened in all marriages and to all wives” (p. 12), indicating a resigned acceptance of her circumstances. Darko weaves themes of complicity, tradition, and identity through Mara’s name, ultimately communicating issues of social justice and the quest for equity.

### 4.1 Tika in *THM*

In Darko’s second text, *THM*, Tika, the heroine in Accra, offers a compelling case of onomastic analysis, revealing themes of puppetry, complicity, vulnerability, and resilience. Her name, derived from the Akan language, consists of two morphemes— “Ti,” meaning “defray,” functioning as a verb, and “ka,” meaning “debt” (Abaka, 1998), symbolically linking her identity to financial obligations. Tika engages in sexual relationships to settle her debts, obtain loans, and manage tariffs associated with her business. Notably, she resorts to sexual favours to clear customs duties. Samuel, the chief customs officer at the Ghana-Togo border, rejects “Tika’s cash offer and indicated lewdly that what he wanted from her was sex. She needed his help, so she consented” (p. 23). This linguistic interpretation suggests a character who navigates the complex socio-economic landscape through sexual encounters to alleviate her debts, reflecting broader societal norms around financial responsibility. These communicative tools

Tika’s life is influenced by her mother, Madam Sekyiwa, positioning her as both a “puppet” and “complicit participant” in the context of prostitution. Tika's acceptance of her mother’s legacy as a

prostitute underscores the societal expectations she grapples with, as illustrated by her maid, Efia, whose grandmother observes: "Child of a whore also turned whore" (p. 81). This familial influence, paired with advice from her mother's friend to leverage her physical allure for financial gain, crafts Tika's dual struggle for power within a patriarchal framework. Borrowing from Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), Tika "wants power, wealth and status like the men" (p.34). Tika's dual struggle for financial stability manifests in her use of "bottom power," a concept that depicts her strategic employment of sexuality in pursuit of success within her professional endeavours. Tika's role is emblematic of the intersection of power, gender and economic necessity, portraying her as a "puppet," similar to Mara in *BTH*, who is similarly manoeuvred by male characters. Ultimately, her commodified sexuality leads to the deterioration of her personal relationships, subsequently leading to her boyfriend Owuraku's decision to terminate their intimate relationship. Darko's intentional choice of the name "Tika" aligns with Ogundipe-Leslie's assertion and serves as a relevant communication tool for examining social ideologies and expectations. I contend that Darko's naming of her fictional character aids a deeper exploration of the complexities of gender, power, and societal constraints.

### 4.2 Akobi in *BTH*

Akobi Ajaman, although often referred to simply as "Akobi," has three morphemes: "A," "ko," and "bi." The initial prefix "A" may carry phonetic significance but lacks independent meaning in context, while "ko" and "bi" represent root morphemes with semantic weight (Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). Contextually, this name translates to "gone there before," suggesting prior educational experience, albeit limited. His recognition as "the first child of Naka to earn Form Four General Certificate" (p.5) bestows traditional prestige within his community. However, his professional role as a "messenger clerk in ministries" (p.5) shows a low-status occupation, typically regarded as one of the least prestigious in administrative structures across both Africa and Europe.

Despite his modest position, Akobi's educational background earns him respect among the Nakaians, especially from his wife, Mara. She shows this respect through her nurturing actions. For instance, she wakes early to prepare for his day:

It was natural that after I had woken up first at dawn, and made fire to warm up water for Akobi, and carried a bucketful of it with his spongebag to the public bathhouse for him, and returned to wake him up to tell him his bath was ready—it was natural that I also had to stand outside while he bathed just in case some soap suds should go into his eyes and he should need me" (p.12).

This depiction exemplifies the traditional roles and expectations that define Mara's behaviour, revealing her deference to her husband because of his educational achievements.

Throughout the plot, he is depicted negatively as brutish, materialistic, manipulative, heartless, and greedy. Flowing from how he mistreats Mara in the earlier paragraph, Mama Kiosk, Mara's confidante, further corroborates this characterisation, labelling him "a man, but a bad husband" (p. 13). The onoma/epithet "Poison" assigned to the streetlord in Darko's *Faceless* (2003) invokes associations of cruelty and danger. This recurring characterisation calls for a deeper examination of Darko's critique of masculinity and moral ambiguity as articulated by Adjei (2009).

Akobi's neglect of Mara is juxtaposed with his demands for her admiration. His name thus symbolises a negative reputation within the community, critiquing his husbandhood as a moral failure. Darko uses Akobi's name to comment on wider societal issues, framing him as a crusader against malevolent attributes that resonate in cultural discourse.

### 4.3 Nsorhwe in *THM*

In the character of Mr. Nsorhwe in *THM*, the name itself is composed of three morphemes— "N" "sor" and "hwe"—and carries significant meaning. Agyekum (2010) linguistically posits that "N" is a prefix commonly used in Ghanaian names; "sor" means "to tempt" or "to entice," while "hwe" translates to "to see" or "to look." Thus, "Nsorhwe" is a noun which can imply the act of envisioning temptation, an ironic reflection of his character as he grapples with the seductive influences of female characters, such as Cherry, his wife, and Efia, Tika's housemaid.

Darko employs this ironic naming to juxtapose Nsorhwe's physical unattractiveness, described as "ugly… plain-faced, … square-headed, and with a pair of buttocks that would have better suited the behind of a Makola mummy, it was as if his creator was in a rotten mood when he made him" (p.82)—against the allure of female temptation. This portrayal challenges traditional perceptions of desirability and highlights the psychological consequences of his lack of physical attractiveness. The dissonance between his name and appearance depicts a paradox of temptation, suggesting that desire can persist independently of one's physical appeal.

Nsorhwe's self-reflection reveals an ingrained awareness of his social standing, as he acknowledges, "whoever decides to be with me will undoubtedly be someone very desperate for something… and left things to fate" (p.83). This recognition complicates his experiences, balancing confidence with vulnerability and highlighting how societal notions of attractiveness can influence personal agency; Nsorhwe understands that any romantic interest stems from others' desperation rather than sincere desire, creating an inner conflict and complicating his relationships as he grapples with the sexual temptations surrounding him.

### 4.4 Europe and Naka on Mara's Life

Europe's significant influence on Mara's life shapes her perception, portraying it as a place of redemption. This is depicted when she reflects nostalgically on Europe's allure: "Ah, when we were young in Naka, we used to imagine Europe not just to be near Heaven but Heaven itself … That is why people who go there return very beautiful" (p.55). This romanticised vision leads Mara to acquiesce to oppressive actions, revealing her complicity in her degradation. Thus, Darko critiques victimisation through onomastics, urging readers to explore the complex interplay between idealism, complicity, and identity in the context of migration.

Mara embodies a complex duality that highlights her agency and resilience, ultimately offering a positive representation. The name "Mara" carries biblical connotations of vulnerability, dispossession, and redemption, particularly relevant to female migratory subjectivity. This multifaceted representation allows a critical examination of names as identifiers and vehicles of narrative influence.

Mara's actions— strategically engaging in legal manoeuvres to imprison her husband, Akobi, in Germany, while concurrently orchestrating the deportation of his girlfriend, Comfort, to Nigeria— demonstrate her calculated efforts to regain agency. Her resort to fraudulent methods to obtain a five-year resident's visa shows her determination to secure stability in Munich.

As the plot develops, Mara's trajectory shifts as she embraces prostitution as her profession. Though controversial, this choice empowers her to provide material support for her family at Naka, "mother and sons back home" (p.139). The narrative traces Mara's evolution, culminating in her gaining a voice and a deeper understanding of "the world a bit better" (p.127). Through these developments, Darko portrays Mara as a determined, resilient, and vocal figure adept at navigating complex challenges, aligning with Asempasah and Sam's (2016) assertion that "Mara" in *BTH* functions "as a name and concept that summons a specific biblical discourse that foregrounds female migratory subjectivity, vulnerability, dispossession and redemption, and a Fanti concept of a beleaguered and ethical subjectivity that emerges from complicity, radical decision and agency" (Asempasah & Sam, 2016, p.154).

These findings address research questions 1 and 2 regarding the significance of Mara's name, showing the interplay between survival, agency, and identity in contemporary contexts. The text invites analysis of how names both mask and reveal the characters' experiences, exposing their struggles with agency, identity, and socio-economic realities today.

### 4.5 Accra on Tika's Life

Residing in Accra, Tika engages in sexual liaisons with her male lovers to secure financial stability, demonstrating a pragmatic approach to relationships. Her relationship with Nsorhwe is driven by her need for "an overdraft from his bank" (p.82), showcasing her complicit strategic use of sexuality as a survival tactic within the competitive milieu of business in Accra. This pragmatic approach serves as a survival tactic for Tika, depicting how her sexuality can be commodified in a market-driven society. Her narrative invites readers to consider the moral ambiguities that surface when financial security intersects with personal aspirations, ultimately challenging narratives around love, intimacy, and empowerment in a changing socio-economic environment.

### 4.6 Germany on Akobi's Life

Upon relocating to Germany, Akobi struggles with the local population's difficulty in pronouncing his African name and opts to shorten it to the more phonetically accessible "Cobby." This renaming signifies a shift in his social status and ideological orientation. Darko communicates that African men, viewed as cultural stewards, may alter their identities to pursue economic opportunities. Ogunwale and Bamigbade (2012) interpret Akobi's renaming as a manifestation of the socio-linguistic phenomena of name-dropping and name-changing, which are indicative of contemporary African elites. Such attitudes reflect a concerning trend of linguistic alienation and cultural subversion. This theme resonates with Udenwa in Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009, pp.169-173), where he adopts the name Dave Bell upon his arrival in America, relinquishing his African identity in favour of a Western designation. Both authors reveal how name changes and cultural adaptation reflect broader ideological transformations in postcolonial contexts (Koussouhon & Allagbe, 2013). The exploration of these characters ultimately reveals the intricate relationship among identity, cultural custodianship, and the pressures exerted by globalisation.

Now known as "Cobby," Akobi continues to show disrespect towards women, mirroring his earlier treatment of Mara. This behaviour extends to his German wife, Gittie, unmasking a persistent disregard for women's dignity and agency.

### 4.7 Britain and Kataso on Nsorhwe's Life

Though Nsorhwe lacks in looks, he is brainy, which earns him a scholarship to study further in Britain (p. 82). Nsorhwe's self-reflection reveals an ingrained awareness of his social standing, as he contemplates, "whoever decides to be with me will undoubtedly be someone very desperate for something… and left things to fate" (p.83). This recognition of his perceived shortcomings creates a dynamic between confidence and vulnerability. It demonstrates how social standards of attractiveness can influence personal agency; Nsorhwe understands that any romantic interest he receives is likely

driven by others' despair rather than sincere desire. This inner conflict complicates his relationships, as he grapples with the sexual temptations that surround him while remaining acutely aware of his own limitations.

Cherry's character serves as a compelling counterpart to Nsorhwe's challenges. She is portrayed as a "frustrated Ghanaian woman struggling to make a life in London," and her attempts to capture Nsorhwe's attention expose her own vulnerabilities and aspirations (p.89). Cherry's pursuit of Nsorhwe reflects a dual desire for companionship and a quest for validation within a foreign environment that often marginalises her. In contrast, at Kataso, Efia's submission to the sexual temptations of Nsorhwe reveals the potentially destructive implications of desire. Her acquiescence, in Tika's absence, suggests a failure to navigate the complexities of temptation and agency, communicating a narrative steeped in moral conflict.

The most critical predicament emerges when Efia assertively claims that Nsorhwe is the father of her child, a declaration made in the presence of her employer, Tika, her mother, Maame Amoakona, and her grandmother. Nsorhwe, whose name means "temptation," navigates this complex situation with two primary concerns. First, he acknowledges that Efia is seeking financial support. Second, he confronts the harsh reality of his impotence, which renders him incapable of fathering a child, as emphasised by the assertion that "his sperm could never fertilise an egg" (p.85). This context positions Nsorhwe as a character marked by honesty and non-violence, standing in stark contrast to the enticing female desire shown by Efia. To safeguard his integrity and clarify the matter, Nsorhwe opts to undergo a DNA test to validate his claim that Efia has wrongfully accused him. His decision not only manifests his commitment to truth but also communicates his desire to maintain harmony in the face of adversity.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings demonstrate that Darko's strategic onomastic choices serve as a communicative tool to cover the multifaceted layers of female oppression and suppression, while highlighting the identity struggles faced by characters like Mara and Tika in their pursuit of autonomy and dignity. The names reflect societal constraints yet embody resilience and agency. By examining these themes, the narrative fosters a nuanced understanding of its female characters' experiences and contributes to a broader discourse on community resilience. Additionally, the male characters' names enhance their identities, further enriching the communication within the narrative. Darko's portrayal of male characters reinforces societal power dynamics that perpetuate women's subjugation (Adjei, 2009). Analysing two pivotal characters— Akobi from *BTH* and Nsorhwe in *THM*—reveals deeper insights

into men's roles as both crusaders and custodians in the thematic exploration of communication and the implications of name changes in postcolonial identity (Pucherová, 2017).

In light of the preceding analysis, while Mr Nsorhwe's name remains constant, unlike Akobi's, the characterisation of Nsorhwe and the thematic exploration of temptation in *THM* prompt readers to reconsider the interplay between self-worth, societal standards, and the complex nature of desire. The ironic implications of his name encapsulate the complexities of human relationships and the vulnerabilities inherent within them, communicating how the boundaries between temptation, desperation, and agency can often be indistinct (Eagleton, 2007). This examination underscores the narrative's deep exploration of the human condition, particularly as it pertains to identity and desire amid a societal landscape fraught with challenges and expectations.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the significance of onomastics in communication within the narratives of Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid*. It reveals how naming practices shape characterisation and influence roles and identities within the texts. For instance, the fictional name "Mara," situated within both biblical and Fante cultural contexts, communicates her bitter marital experiences, revealing layers of complicity, vulnerability, and the perception of her as a pawn in her circumstances. The analysis argues that names go beyond mere linguistic identifiers; they function as crucial communicative instruments of fiction that can simultaneously unmask and mask individuals' identities, social roles, and existential complexities within Ghanaian cultural contexts. These findings corroborate the claims of Agyekum (2006) and Obeng (1998), who argue that names go beyond mere linguistic tags and resonate with broader themes of identity, gender politics, and lived experience.

The analysis presented in this study also portrays how the connotations and semantic meanings embedded in the character names depict the nuanced relationships between characters and their environments. Names such as Nsorhwe serve not merely as identifiers but also as representations of the social contexts and cultural narratives that shape the characters' experiences. Wamitila (1999) states that "one of the most basic qualities about a name is the relationship with a 'particular' culture; this is what can be termed as the social contextuality of naming" (p.37). The names in the two novels under examination are firmly rooted in their cultural contexts, specifically Ghana, except for *BTH*, which unfolds in both Ghana and Germany. Notably, both countries share patriarchal societies. Furthermore, Amma Darko's intentional selection of names, exemplified by characters like Mara and Tika, portrays the complexities of complicity and vulnerability within oppressive systems. This not only deepens the texts' themes but also encourages readers to contemplate the broader implications of identity, naming conventions, and societal structures.

Ultimately, Darko's oeuvre communicates the significance of names as cultural artefacts that depict the complex relationships between characters and their environments. This resonates with Koussouhon et al.'s (2015) assertion that names encode the author's ideological worldview. Darko uses satirical nomenclature to critique the patriarchal powers manifested by Akobi and Nsorhwe, who embody and perpetuate malevolent characteristics. This study contributes to literary onomastics by showing that names are a critical lens through which readers can uncover meaning in fiction, fostering a greater appreciation of the intricate web of identity and place in literary texts.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

The study highlights the crucial role of names in literature, as framed by De Vries's (2006) literary onomastics, depicting that names serve not only as markers of identity but also as vessels of communication, culture, social, and ideological meaning. By unmasking the layers of meaning embedded in names in Darko's Beyond the Horizon and The Housemaid, the research elucidates how onomastics serves as a powerful tool for conveying cultural, social, and ideological significance. The implication extends to enhancing literary and communication appreciation, as readers and scholars are encouraged to recognise the thematic significance embedded in names. This understanding prompts a deeper engagement with the texts, fostering awareness of how linguistic forms and cultural contexts interact to shape perceptions of identity. Examining Akan names also offers insights into cultural representation and communication, particularly in postcolonial contexts. By analysing how names reflect and complicate identity, the study contributes to broader discussions on power dynamics and the politics of communication in literary narratives. Ultimately, this study advocates for literary onomastics as a critical lens that connects communication, language, identity and culture.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The academic limitations of studying names like Darko include contextual variability, as interpretations may differ across diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the subjective nature of onomastics can lead to varying analyses, complicating the establishment of universally applicable conclusions. Future research could explore the intersection of naming conventions and cultural identity in broader literary contexts, examining how these dynamics operate in other authors' works from different regions. Expanding the scope to include comparative studies between Ghanaian literature and other cultural narratives may yield richer insights into the significance of names. Ultimately, a deeper exploration of how names function as communicative tools across genres could deepen the understanding of their roles in shaping identity and societal structures.

## 8. REFERENCES


Abaka, E. (1998). *Akan Language and Culture*. Accra: University of Ghana Press.

Adichie, C. N. (2009). *The Thing Around Your Neck*. First Edition, Lagos: Farafina.

Adjei, M. (2009). Male-Bashing and narrative subjectivity in Amma Darko's first three novels. *SKATE Journal of Literary Studies*. 1, 47–61. http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JLS01/pdf_doc/04.pdf.

Agyekum, K. (2010). The sociolinguistics of Akan personal names. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(2), 206–235. https://doi.org/10.53228/njas.v15i2.24

Agyekum, K. (2006). Names and identity in Ghanaian society. *International Journal of Names Studies*, 1(2), 45- 60.

Alasli, M. (2019). Toponyms' contribution to identity: The case study of Rabat (Morocco). *Proceedings of the International Cartographic Association, 2*, 3. https://doi.org/10.5194/ica-proc-2-3-2019

Argo, J. J., Popa, M., & Smith, M. C. (2010). The sound of brands: An investigation of the effects of sounds in brand names on consumer evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 20*(1), 101–112.

Asempasah, R., & Sam, A. C. (2016). Reconstituting the self: Of names, discourses and agency in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2(4), 154-168. http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/indes

Black, S., & Wilcox, B. (2011). Sense and serendipity: Some ways fiction writers choose character names. *Names, 59*(3), 152–163.

Brennan, S., Ilicic, J., & Danziger, S. (2024). Snyre for your nasal congestion: Using phonesthemes to imbue non-word brand names with meaning. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 34*(4), 601–619. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1396

Bright, W. (2003). What is a name? Reflections on onomastics. *Language and Linguistics* 4(4): 669-681.

Chan, A. K. K., & Huang, Y.-Y. (2001). Chinese brand naming: A linguistic analysis of the brands of ten product categories. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 10*(2), 103–119. https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420110388663

Carstairs-McCarthy, A. (2002). Language arts and disciplines. *Current Morphology*. Routledge.

Darko, A. (1995). *Beyond the Horizon*. London: Heinemann.

Darko, A. (1998). *The Housemaid*. London: Heinemann.

Darko, A. (2003). *Faceless*. First Edition. Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers.

De Vries, G.R.W.W. (2006). Names in literature: An omniscient guide to literary onomastics.

*Journal of Literary Studies*, 22(4), 93–105.

DiYanni, R. (2001). *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. Pennsylvania State University: McGraw-Hill.

Eagleton, T. (2007). *The meaning of life: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Gibka, M. (2025). A comparative analysis of functions served by characters' proper names in Terry Pratchett's *The Fifth Elephant* and its Polish translation. *Onomastica, 68*, 17. https://doi.org/10.17651/ONOMAST.68.17

González-del-Río, J., Ampuero-Canellas, O., Jordá-Albiñana, B., & Magal-Royo, T. (2012). El nombre de marca: Interrelación de factores lingüísticos y corporativos. *Revista de Lingüística y Lenguas Aplicadas, 7*, 91–101. https://doi.org/10.4995/rlyla.2011.902

Gonzalez, V. T. (2010). Approche onomastique des grandes marées de Jacques Poulin. *Cedilla, Revista de Estudios Franceses*, 6, 245-256.

Heyd, T. (2022). First names and sociolinguistic enregisterment: Digital tropes of linguistic mobility. *Language & Communication*, 87, 271-283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2022.09.003.

Kongo, A. E., Fenyi, D. A., Jones-Mensah, I., & Tabiri, M. O. (2025). Morphemic patterns of medicine brand names on the Ghanaian market. *African Journal of Applied Research, 11*(1), 892–909. https://doi.org/10.26437/ajar.v11i1.889

Koussouhon, A. L., & Allagbe, A. A. (2013). The lexicogrammar of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fiction: A systemic functional contribution, *Language & Devenir*, 22, Revue Semestrielle, 19–44.

Koussouhon, A. L., Akogbeto, P. & Allagbe, A. A. (2015). Decoding the context of ideology in two extracts from a contemporary Ghanaian prose work. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 2(4): 129–139.

Obeng, S. G. (1998). Akan death prevention names: A pragmatic and structural analysis. *Names*, 46(3), 163–187.

Ogunwale, J. A. & Bamigbade, O. E. (2012). Linguistic alienation and culture subversion as sociolinguistic factors for name dropping and change among the so-called Yoruba elites. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS),* 19(11): 42–53.

Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (1994). *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Özbal, G., Strapparava, C., & Tekiroğlu, S. S. (2012). Generating creative product names. In *Proceedings of the 50th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics: Short Papers* (pp. 494–498). Association for Computational Linguistics.

Oyewo, A. (2024). Understanding communication through fictional names. *Journal of Literary*

*Studies*, 45(2), 113 -128.

Palaeas, M. (2005). The importance of being "Ernest" in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: A study in literary onomastics. *Names, 53*(3), 203–215. https://doi.org/10.1179/nam.2005.53.3.203

Pucherová, D. (2017). Ethics and Human Rights in Anglophone African Women's Literature: Feminist Empathy by Chielozona Eze (review). *Research in African Literatures*. 48(4):268– 270.

Pugh, T., & Johnson, M. E. (2014). *Literary studies: A practical guide*. Routledge.

Rey, A. (1995). *Essays on Terminology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Schmitt, B. H., & Zhang, S. (2012). Selecting the right brand name: An examination of tacit and explicit linguistic knowledge in name translations. *Journal of Brand Management, 19*, 655–665.

Seema, J. (2019). The analysis of characters' names in Matlosa's novel *Mopheme* from a narratological perspective. *Nomina Africana: Journal of African Onomastics, 33*(2), 125–135. https://doi.org/10.2989/NA.2019.33.2.4.1341

Shrum, L. J., Lowrey, T. M., Luna, D., Lerman, D. B., & Liu, M. (2012). Sound symbolism effects across languages: Implications for global brand names. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 29*(3), 275–279. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2012.03.002

Udoye, I. & Cyril, O. (2012). A morphological analysis of Akwa personal names. *Journal of Arts and Contemporary Society,* 3, 85–89.

Wamitila, K. W. (1999). What is a name: Towards literary onomastics in Kiswahili Literature. *AAP* 60, pp. 35–44.

Zalta, N. E. (2003). Referring to fictional characters. *Dialectica* 57(2): 243–254.

Zawawi, M. S. (1993). *What's in a Name Unaitwaje? A Swahili Book of Names*. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc.

Zvolenszky, Z. (2015). Inadvertent creation and fictional characters. *Organon F*. 22: 169–184 (*Supplementary Issue*).